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ABSTRACT

The New Jersey State Facilitator Project of the New Jersey State Department of Education attempted to implement the department's urban education improvement plan. A meeting with urban educators was held to discuss the services available through the Facilitator Project and how they might best be provided to the cities. The project was committed to adopt, by June 30, 1976, at least one educational program approved for national dissemination by 14 or more of 28 "urban aid" districts in the State. The Utah Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction (ECRI) was chosen by the Facilitator Project as having the highest potential for urban districts desiring a reading program. Consultants working for the Project assisted in the implementation of this reading program in 15 cities. The Facilitator Project continued to develop strategies for improving education in the remaining New Jersey cities. (Author/APM)

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# THE URBAN THRUST OF THE NEW JERSEY STATE FACILITATOR PROJECT

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In January 1975, the staff of the Facilitator Project, like that of most other Facilitator Projects, had spent much time visiting programs from other states, and publicizing the services available to districts through the National Diffusion Network. Several subject-oriented awareness conferences were planned and in-state training capacity was being developed for two projects.

At the same time, the New Jersey Department of Education initiated a coordinated urban emphasis reaching through many of its units and locations, including the Facilitator Project, within the Division of Research, Planning and Evaluation.

The focus of this urban thrust was the twenty eight cities designated by the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs as "urban aid cities". All urban aid cities have a population exceeding 5,000, over 305 ADC children, publicly financed housing, an equalized tax rate exceeding the State's and an equalized valuation per capita less than the State's. This set of criteria was adopted by the Department of Education specifically for its broad definition of urban needs which would support a collaborative interagency approach to meeting urban education needs. To implement this coordinated urban emphasis, the Department established an Urban Education Observatory. The Observatory was developed not to centralize the various services which the Department provided to urban districts, but to provide a focal point for

research, strategies and priorities related to such services.

Two events translated this urban emphasis into concrete reality for the Facilitator Project. The first was a meeting with urban educators arranged in order to discuss the services available through the Facilitator Project and how they might best be provided to the cities. The educators requested awareness activities directed specifically to urban needs, involving high level administrators as well as teachers, and a clear committment to cities of adequate technical and financial assistance.

Preparation of the FY 76 Continuation Proposal for the Project provided the second point of redirection toward a distinct urban focus. Goal #1 of that plan commits the Facilitator Project to an adoption by June 30, 1976 of at least one program approved for national dissemination by at least half (14) of the 28 urban aid districts.

To implement this urban focus, several activities were initiated. A series of summer planning sessions with the Department's intermediate units, Education Improvement Centers (EICs), in the south and northwest regions of the state resulted in a clearer division of responsibility for planning and implementing activities of the Facilitator Project. In addition, responsibility for providing technical assistance to adoptors in the northeast and the central regions of the state was assigned

to each region's neighboring EIC, until the planned centers for these areas were developed. Arrangements were also made with the Department's special education resource libraries in the northeast and central regions to develop and manage resource libraries of 306 curriculum and training materials for use of districts in those regions.

With these arrangements made for meeting the technical assistance needs of the urban districts, the Facilitator Project began planning an urban awareness conference to respond to the request for activities directed specifically to the needs of city schools. Programs for the urban conference were selected by a Department-wide group of staff familiar with urban problems and potential, as well as with the characteristics of the programs available for dissemination. The conceptual approach finally chosen was to offer indepth awareness of a wide scope of programs, divided into a session for elementary level programs and one for secondary programs. Since such a large number of the programs available had relevance for urban schools, the urban conference was designed to indicate that variety, and to publicize the assistance available so that districts would send staff to later subject-oriented conferences sponsored by the Project. Staff of other units of the Department who had worked closely with urban districts contributed to an urban mailing list and made personal phone calls to encourage attendance.

To meet the final request of the urban educators, the Project announced that 30% - 40% of all financial assistance available to adoptors would be allocated to the urban aid districts. This figure was based on the fact that the twenty-eight cities, although representing only 5% of the total number of New Jersey LEAs, represent almost 30% of the weighted student enrollment in the state.

As a result of such efforts, the urban conference was heavily attended and by the end of each day, several districts were discussing future steps with Project staff. Participants in the urban conference continue to receive special invitations to all awareness activities sponsored by the Project.

The urban emphasis is also evident in joint activities between the Facilitator Project and other units of the department. For example, twenty-five percent of all awareness and training cosponsored by the Project and the Department's Division of Vocational Education is allocated to urban districts and counties.

The Utah Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction (ECRI) Program was chosen by the New Jersey Right to Read Program and the Facilitator Project as having the Highest potential for urban districts desiring a reading program. Consequently, an in-state training capacity was developed utilizing Right to Read staff. The first round of training was offered only to urban districts and they continued to be well

represented in later sessions. As a result, teachers from fifteen urban aid cities have been trained in the ECRI Program.

Special consultants are used, when necessary, to assist urban districts adopting difficult programs, such as the Simu-School Program from Dallas. Such consultants working for the Facilitator Project can insure that the implementation mode used provides maximal impact through coordination with all knowledgeable parties in the department and throughout the state. Such an approach is currently suggesting that the Simu-School programs should be installed on the statewide Education Computer Network instead of individual city computers so as to be easily accessible to all large districts and to facilitate use by regional consortiums of smaller districts.

Not all of the Project's efforts in the urban area are aimed toward immediate increases in the number of adoptions. The Project is also committed to advancing the state of the art of dissemination theory and practice as it pertains to urban districts. Toward this end, a three stage behavioral-technical study is being conducted of program adoptions in urban districts. An extensive case study of one urban district with an adoption of a general education program and a special education project will be supplemented by in-depth interviews in a larger number of urban adoptor districts and a conference of urban adoptors to publicize and refine the results of the study.

Project staff have participated with EIC planning staff and the Urban

Education Observatory in the design of a statewide needs assessment instrument. This needs survey is structured to provide data not only on the four regions of the state but also on the urban, and the compensatory education subgroupings within each region.

As a result of such strategies, New Jersey currently has adoptions of out of state programs in 18 of the 28 urban aid districts. Of the 18 cities, six have adoptions of two programs, and four more have three adoptions each. New Jersey DRP programs, having been included in appropriate awareness activities, are also reporting increased requests for service from urban districts.

Currently the Facilitator Project is analyzing which urban aid cities do not have an adoption and are not planning one. Individualized strategies will be developed in concert with the Urban Observatory utilizing the full resources of the Department to impact on each of the remaining cities.